DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 949 CE 078 981

TITLE	Facilitating Organizational Change.
PUB DATE	1999-03-00
NOTE	27p.; In: Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Conference Proceedings; see CE 078 963. Paper by Scanlon (17-4) is not included.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Business Administration; Educational Needs; Educational Practices; Employee Attitudes; Employer Attitudes; Employer Employee Relationship; Group Dynamics; Human Resources; *Labor Force Development; Management Development; On the Job Training; *Organizational Change; Outcomes of Education; *Quality of Working Life; Staff Development; Teaching Methods; Teamwork; Training Methods; Unions; Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Facilitators; *High Performance Work Organizations

ABSTRACT

The first of the three papers in this symposium, "Conflicts that Arise in Small Group Facilitation: A Descriptive Study of Accounts, Actions, Outcomes, and Assessments" (Judith A. Kolb, William J. Rothwell), contains self-report verbatim accounts contributed by facilitators and the results of a literature review on small group conflict. "A Test of a Rapid Developer Model: Workplace Factors Associated with Learning and Development" (James A. Alexander) identifies the work environment factors that could be expected to be associated with rapid development and their identification by managers and employees. "Barriers to Transformation Change: High Performance Workplace Practices and Unionized Companies" (Joseph A. Benkowski) identifies the characteristics of high-performance workplaces as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace in the categories of training, participation, organization, and partnership as practiced in unionized companies in Wisconsin. Also examined is the relationship between the implementation level of these high-performance workplace practices and the level of labor-management cooperation. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 431 949

17 **Facilitating Organizational Change**

Chair: Sharon J. Korth, Xavier University

17 - 1 Conflicts that Arise in Small Group Facilitation: A Descriptive Study of Accounts, Actions, Outcomes, and Assessments

Judith A. Kolb, Pennsylvania State University

William J. Rothwell, Pennsylvania State University

17 - 2 A Test of a Rapid Developer Model: Workplace Factors Associated with Learning and Development

James A. Alexander, AFSM International

17 - 3 Barriers to Transformation Change: High Performance Workplace Practices and Unionized Companies

Joseph A. Benkowski, University of Wisconsin-Stout

17 - 4 Pew Sitter or Church Pillar: A Case Study of a Non-Profit Organization's Need for A Director of Volunteer Development to Mobilize Its Volunteer Force

Patrice M. Scanlon, George Washington University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

JA Kolb JA Benkowski
JA Rothwell

2A

CE078981

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Conflicts That Arise in Small Group Facilitation: A Descriptive Study of Accounts, Actions, Outcomes, and Assessments

Judith A. Kolb
William J. Rothwell
Pennsylvania State University

The purpose of this article is to report and discuss the types of conflicts that arise in small group facilitation. Data were taken from self-report accounts contributed by facilitators who are members of the International Society for Performance Improvement. Verbatim accounts of conflict situations are cited, relevant literature on small group conflict is reviewed and discussed, and suggestions for future research are *offered.*

Keywords: Facilitation, Teams, Conflict

With today's organizational emphasis on teamwork, there is an increasing interest in and need for small group facilitation. There is little understanding, however, of what facilitation is or what facilitators actually do. Frey (1994, p. 4) offers this definition of facilitation, "any meeting technique, procedure, or practice that makes it easier for groups to interact and/or accomplish their goals." Meeting procedures are defined by Poole (1991, p. 55) as, "set of rules or guidelines which specify how a group should organize its process to achieve a particular goal." Thus, small group facilitators are individuals who help group members improve group process in order to expedite goal accomplishment. To improve group process, the facilitator needs to have an understanding of how groups operate.

The dual needs of small groups were first recognized by Bales (1950) who labeled the two needs task and social-emotional. Schein in 1979 and later in 1987 applied Bales' work to human relations training and process consultation. He specified that task or content is the work that is to be done by the group. Task process focuses on ways of getting the job done. This includes such things as setting an agenda, the use of decision-making and/or problem-solving techniques, and time management. Maintenance process focuses on ways of getting the group's psychosocial needs met and the development of satisfying relationships among group members. Maintenance includes such things as levels of participation, power issues, dealing with dysfunctional members, and setting appropriate norms of behavior. Almost fifty years after Bales' work, task and maintenance functions still are recognized as central to group functioning. Reddy (1994) suggests the following questions be asked by the facilitator: "Is the group operating effectively? Is the group running efficiently? Are members satisfied with what they are doing and how they are doing it?" (p. 29).

A wide body of academic literature on small groups exists. For a review of recent studies, see Bettenhausen (1991). This literature is rife with research on the efficacy of a variety of decision-making techniques (e.g., brainstorming, Delphi, nominal group). Many of these studies were conducted on student samples in laboratory settings (see, for example, Burleson, Levine, & Samter, 1984; Hirokawa, 1985; Jablin, 1981; Jarboe, 1988, Miner, 1984). More recent attention has turned to the study of small groups or teams in organizations (e.g., Ancona, 1990; Brooks, 1994; Gersick, 1988; Glaser, 1994; Hackman, 1990; Hirokawa & Keyton, 1995; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995; Kolb, 1995; Larkey, 1996; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995; Stevens, 1994). Conflict in small groups has been the focus of numerous research studies (e.g., Appelbaum, 1992; Coman, 1996; Hall & Wallace, 1996; Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992; Kochery, 1993; McRoy, 1996; Pace, 1990; Pelled, 1996; Pelled & Adler, 1994; Rybak, 1997; Valacich & Schwenk, 1995).

The study reported here adds to the literature by describing what facilitators actually do to handle conflict situations that arise in facilitated organizational groups. Accounts of facilitation challenges and/or problems were collected from facilitators as part of a larger study designed to analyze the behaviors and competencies of small group facilitators in organizations. Since the number one challenge or problem reported by respondents was handling conflict, the focus of this article is an analysis and discussion of the types of conflicts that occur in small groups, how facilitators handle these conflicts, the results of their efforts, and how facilitators would change or not change the way they handle similar conflicts in the future.

Copyright © 1999 Judith A. Kolb & William J. Rothwell

Research Questions

RQ1: What types of conflict situations were described as challenging and/or problematic by small group facilitators?

RQ2: How were these conflict situations handled by facilitators and what happened as a result of the facilitators' actions?

Methodology

Sample

Letters and questionnaires were mailed to 304 members of the International Society for Performance Improvement requesting their participation in a small group facilitation study. Sixty-three individuals who indicated that they facilitated small groups participated in the study. Of these, 68 percent described themselves as human resource development professionals; the remainder listed a variety of job titles, such as industrial psychologist, program development specialist, training and development manager, performance technologist, instructional designer, and teacher.

Three-fourths of the participants worked in the following industries: manufacturing, 19%; transportation / communication / utilities, 14%; government / armed services, 11%; finance / insurance / real estate, 10%; and other services, 21%. The remainder came from a variety of industry categories. Industry size breakdowns were as follows: below 100 employees, 24%; 100 - 499, 7%; 500 - 1999, 19%; 2000 - 4999, 10%; 5000 - 9999, 11%; 10,000 and above, 29%.

Procedure

Participants furnished demographic information and responded to the following four-part question:

If you have facilitated small groups, answer the following questions:

A. What was the most difficult small group facilitation challenge or problem you have ever faced? (Describe situation. Do not list names of individuals, though you may list job titles.)
B. What did you do? (Explain.)
C. What happened as a result of what you did? (Describe the consequences of your actions.)
D. If you were faced with exactly the same problem again, how would you handle it? Why would you handle it that way?

Eight participants either left the question blank or wrote illegible responses. The remaining fifty five responses were coded using thematic analytic methods of transcription--looking for "recurring regularities" in the data, and sorting the regularities into categories that "dovetail in a meaningful way" (Patton, 1980, p. 311). The following decision rules were adopted for the coding: (1) the entire response (A - D) would be the unit of analysis, (2) each response would be coded under only one primary theme, 3) in the case of two of more issues running throughout the response, the facilitator's response to Item D would be used to decide on the primary theme. All situations were able to be coded using this procedure. Issues mentioned in the responses, but not identified as primary themes, were coded for further analysis and noted for discussion purposes. The responses coded under the two primary themes of Internal Conflict and Dysfunction/disruptive group member(s) are the ones reported and discussed in this paper.

Results

In this section, a description is given for each of the two themes, followed by four verbatim transcripts of responses coded under that theme, and a brief summary section. Relevant issues stemming from the examples are discussed in the following section.

Internal Conflict

This code was used for situations in which disagreements and/or discord among group members appeared to be the primary issue. The conflict could be issue- or relationship-based; however, it needed to concern all or most group members and be relevant to the project at hand. Quarrels between just two individuals that were not described as being relevant to the entire group were coded elsewhere (under Dysfunctional/Disruptive Group Members).

Example 1:

A. Groups who need to work together but do not want to because they have issues or problems w/other group members
B. Press the group on what they want together. Determine if there is a goal they all think is important
C. They decided they cared more about the longer range goal than short term conflicts

1. I would spend more time w/ each group member individually before convening the larger group, helping them be clear about their personal goals & shared goals

Example 2:

A. Re: Planning diversity training. Negative attitudes about the subject expressed by 1/2 of group. Belief that we could not & should not undertake this project. All staff members: 3 female, 3 male; Positive side 2 female, 1 male; negative side 2 males, 1 female. The positive and negatives began to argue.
B. Called for a short break – When mtg. resumed recapped situation, "I hear that you have some concerns . . ." – Asked several questions to clarify what the real issue was-discovered that the negative members are left brained & needed more information.

1. Both sides have a better understanding of the needs of the other group – Provided more info, reassured group of my confidence in their abilities – Brought in other trainers to provide skill based instruction in the areas of concern-(i.e. conflict management & facilitation)
2. I would ask for more information-I would ask what information/resources I could provide – I tend to try to solve problems before I know the root cause. – I believe if I ask questions & let the group talk I will more likely be able to steer the group to a win-win. BFR, I would start talking & counseling.

Example 3:

A. Dealing with disputing factions

1. Clarified the perspectives of the different parties. Then asked the whole group what direction they wanted to pursue and guided them to some resolution
2. There was agreement to disagree on some of the fine points of their dispute and consensus on continuing the process to develop something that would satisfy everyone
3. About the same thing, but I might stay out of the process even more

Example 4:

A. Dealing with conflict among team members
B. Helped focus group on conflict to try to get an openness; handled individual conflicts outside of the group where necessary by getting individuals to talk w/ each other

1. Got some agreement but not all from different participants
2. Force individuals to face issues earlier. Things lingered too long.

Summary

Under the theme of Internal Conflict, the facilitators helped the groups do the following: clarify issues, focus on goals and identify common areas of interest, and participate in a full discussion. Additional issues raised by these examples include: (1) under what conditions do facilitators meet privately with individuals? and (2) what is the facilitator's role in dealing with a group's lack of information on the issues?

Dysfunctional/disruptive Group Member(s)

In contrast to the first identified theme, Internal Conflict, situations under this code involved either one or two dysfunctional/disruptive individuals whose behavior was detrimental to the group. When the situation involved two individuals, the argument appeared to go beyond what would be expected of two colleagues disagreeing on a work-related matter.

Example 1:

A. A very disruptive person stated their issue (which was off the topic) and would not move on.
B. Put on an issue chart/parking lot. And forced the issue to the side. The person would not quit venting.
C. Review with the person & the V.P. they report to.

- Same way-would intervene even more quickly

Example 2:

A. A very junior member of the team with no trust in the process – Used "they" all the time.
B. Tried to keep group focused on the problem & process – I got sucked in by getting irritated at the person (oldest error in the book!)

- Individual dropped off the team due to pressure from other team members who were equally irritated.
- Next time: Establish ground rule up front to – only speak for yourself – avoid using "they"-use data

Example 3:

A. Overt arguments between participants. Two people hotly disagreed on a subject. One left the room and refused to come back.
B. Immediately had the group take a break. Talked to both people separately, then together.
C. They reached an "operating agreement" to be civil during the group sessions.
D. Try to step in earlier to prevent what happened. The group got nervous & then gossip started on the breaks

Example 4:

A. Open conflict between group participants
B. Moved toward a break in group session, then confronted the problem in a private setting with individuals involved to resolve the conflict or terminate their participation.
C. Conflict was eliminate in the session but further private session were need to solve the problem.
D. I would handle it the same way with a similar group size. (more than 10 participants). I believe it is counter productive to involve all participants in conflict resolution. If they were not a party before hand.

Summary

In dealing with dysfunctional and/or disruptive member(s), facilitators attempted to refocus; two talked to disruptive individuals privately during break time. All seemed to agree that immediate steps were necessary before behavior negatively affected the group. One issue raised is the same as was previously identified under the theme of Internal Conflict: (1) at what point do you talk to individuals privately? Additional issues are: (2) at what point do you talk to a group member's boss, and what are the ethical considerations related to this? and (3) how does the facilitator's reaction to conflict (e.g., the facilitator becoming irritated in Example 2) affect the group?

Discussion

Participants in this study were asked to focus on "the most difficult small group facilitation challenge or problem you have ever faced." In this context, issues related to dealing with conflict emerged as the number one challenge and/or problem cited by small group facilitators. If the Dysfunctional/disruptive Group Member(s) and Internal

Conflict categories are combined (since both deal with conflict in one form or another), 36 percent of the incidents described by participants in this study were related to conflict. Before concluding that conflict is rampant in facilitated groups, however, it is important to note the small size of this sample and the wording of the study questions.

Although the word "conflict" often has a negative connotation, disagreement among group members can improve a group's decision-making. Janis's (1983) often-cited work on groupthink found that highly cohesive groups suspend critical thinking and adopt proposed solutions too quickly. Schwarz (1994) states, "How a group manages conflict will affect its ability to solve problems, be creative, and to integrate the different interests of group members with the demands placed on the group" (p. 24).

Before deciding that a conflict is "good" or "bad" then, it is necessary to look at the nature of the conflict. Sources of small group conflicts have been classified as substantive, procedural, and affective (Putnam, 1986). Substantive conflicts involve disagreements over members' ideas and group issues. Procedural conflict is disagreement among group members about the methods of process that should be followed by the group in accomplishing a goal. Affective conflicts involve people's feelings and the way members relate to each other.

Substantive/Procedural Conflicts

Differences of opinion about task issues (substantive/procedural conflicts) are considered healthy and can lead to improved performance (Ross, 1989). Having members participate in the development of a set of norms of acceptable and unacceptable behavior is one way to set the stage for positive group interaction (Schwarz, 1994) and discourage personal attacks. An example of a ground rule related to conflict is, "Criticize ideas, not people." Examples 2 and 3 under Internal Conflicts are examples of substantive/procedural issues. The facilitators in these cases attempted to increase information flow and clarify the perspectives of the different parties. Jandt and Gillette (1985) would agree that people in conflict situations should be encouraged to move away from polarized, single-issue positions and toward an understanding of the complexity of conflict. In other words, there is rarely just one right way to approach a situation. When multiple issues and alternative approaches are uncovered, there is greater chance for group members to make a decision that is agreeable to everyone. Groups often try to make decisions with insufficient information (Gouran, 1986; Kolb, 1996). That, in itself, may cause frustration and conflict as members form perceptions and make assumptions based on insufficient or erroneous information.

Affective Conflicts

Affective conflicts involve emotional battles that may or may not need to be resolved in order for the group to accomplish its purpose. Facilitator attempts to resolve such conflicts are sometimes called maintenance process interventions (Reddy, 1994) or deeper-level interventions (Schwarz, 1994). According to Schwarz, an interpersonal conflict situation between group members that keeps the group from accomplishing its goal would be classified as a Level 3, Instrumental intervention. In this case, the facilitator might ask the group, "Exactly what did members do in working with each other that led to not accomplishing the goals?" (Schwarz, 1994, p. 113). The extent to which group members should be involved in any attempted resolution of these conflicts depends on factors such as the purpose of the group (specifically whether one of the purposes of the group is to also improve its process), the skills of group members, time available, and the skills of the facilitator (Reddy, 1994; Schwarz, 1994). Facilitators may decide, as was the case in several situations cited in this article, to talk privately with individuals. In the case of substantive and/or procedural conflicts, however, group members should be involved since the conflict is related to the task. Interventions at Level 4, Interpersonal and Level 5, Intrapersonal, according to Schwarz (p. 113), involve such facilitator questions such as "How do you feel toward Joe and Bob when this happens?" and "Bob, why do you think you end up in conflicts more frequently than other group members?" Level 5 interventions, in particular, delve into emotional areas that are beyond the scope of most organizational facilitation situations and the skills of most facilitators.

An additional issue that emerged from the examples related to conflict is the extent to which facilitators report to management the results of a facilitation effort and/or process issues that might arise during a group meeting--e.g., Example 2 under Dysfunctional/Disruptive Member(s) where the facilitator reports the dysfunctional individual to his/her manager. Did the member know that this might occur? Questions of loyalty, trust, and credibility are involved in such decisions. Keyton (1994) and Seibold (1994) both raise questions about divided loyalties related to the conflict that may arise between the interests of management and the interests of group members. Whose interests must take precedence?" What about individual privacy rights when the facilitator decides that the group

should discuss why one person always ends up in conflict? Questions like this seem to make a further argument against facilitators becoming involved in Level 5 interventions.

It is interesting to reflect on how a facilitator's personal views and comfort level with conflict might affect the climate of the group, the group's approach to handling conflict, and the facilitator's own view on the disruptive nature of conflict. For example, a facilitator who is very uncomfortable with conflict of any kind might keep the group from fully discussing substantive issues that are essential for the group's success by intervening at the first sign of disagreement. Alternatively, a facilitator who enjoys "stirring things up" might encourage a level of conflict that is inappropriate given the purpose and culture of the group.

Contribution to HRD

Facilitators deal with a variety of issues and process concerns. The more information they have relevant to these issues and concerns, the better equipped they are to help groups improve their process and complete their tasks. This study is one step toward providing that information. In terms of future studies, research that sheds light on how facilitators and members might positively deal with conflict in task groups would be useful. Additionally, quantitative and qualitative studies that focus on the behaviors, skills, competencies, and concerns of facilitators working with groups and teams in organizational settings are needed.

Results of this study have implications for facilitator training. Training programs that include role plays and discussions of small group conflict situations would allow facilitators to practice and receive feedback on a variety of conflict management strategies. Pairing trainees with experienced facilitators for on-the-job training is another way for novice facilitators to develop skills.

References

Appelbaum, S. (1992). Organizational deflection or who owns the real problem?--Debunking the nurse-physician conflict by team building. *Leadership & Organization Development, 13*, 21-26.

Ancona, D. (1990). Outward bound: Strategies for team survival in an organization. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*, 334-365.

Bales, R. F. (1950). *Interaction process analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bettenhausen, K. L. (1991). Five years of group research: What we have learned and what needs to be addressed. *Journal of Management, 17*, 345-381.

Brooks, A. K. (1994). Power and the production of knowledge: Collective team learning in work organizations. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 5*, 213-234.

Burleson, B. R., Levine, B. J., & Samter, W. (1984). Decision-making procedure and decision quality. *Human Communication Research, 10*, 557-574.

Coman, A. (1996). Competency, power, and conflict in group decision making. *Human Systems Management, 15*, 245-255.

Frey, L. R. (1994). Introduction: Applied communication research on group facilitation in natural settings. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *Innovations in group facilitation: Applications in natural settings* (pp. 1-26). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Gersick, C. J. (1988). Time and transitions in work teams: Toward a new model of group development. *Academy of Management Journal, 31*, 9-41.

Glaser, S. (1994). Teamwork and communication: A 3-year case study of change. *Management Communication Quarterly, 7*, 282-296.

Gouran, D. (1986). Inferential errors, interaction, and group decision making. In R. Y. Hirokawa & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and group decision-making* (pp. 81-92). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hackman, J. (1990). Conclusion. Creating more effective work groups. In J. Hackman (Ed.)., *Groups that work (and those that don't)* (pp. 479-508). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, V., & Wallace, M. (1996). Let the team take the strain: Lessons from research into senior management teams in secondary schools. *School Organization, 16*, 297-308.

Hirokawa, R. Y. (1985). Decision procedures and decision-making performance: A test of a functional perspective. *Human Communication Research, 12*, 203-224.

Hirokawa, R. Y., & Keyton, J. (1995). Perceived facilitators and inhibitors of effectiveness in organizational teams. *Management Communication Quarterly, 8*, 424-446.

Jablin, F. M. (1981). Cultivating imagination: Factors that enhance and inhibit creativity in brainstorming groups. *Human Communication Research, 7*, 245-258.

Jackson, S. E., May, K. E., & Whitney, K. (1995). Understanding the dynamics of diversity in decision-making teams. In R. A. Guzzo and E. Salas (Eds.), *Team effectiveness and decision making in organizations* (pp. 204-261). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Jandt, F. E. with Gillette, P. (1985). *Win-win negotiating: Turning conflict into agreement*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Janis, I. (1983). *Groupthink. Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Jarboe, S. (1988). A comparison of input-output, process-output, and input-process-output models of small group problem-solving effectiveness. *Communication Monographs, 55*, 121-142.

Keyton, J. (1994). Using SYMLOG as a self-analytical group. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *Innovations in group facilitation: Applications in natural settings* (pp. 148-174). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Kirchmeyer, C., & Cohen, A. (1992). Multicultural groups: Their performance and reactions with constructive conflict. *Group & Organization Management, 17*, 153-170.

Kochery, T. (1993). Conflict versus consensus: Processes and their effect on team decision making. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 4*, 185-191.

Kolb, J. A. (1995). Leader behaviors affecting team performance: Similarities and differences between leader/member assessments. *Journal of Business Communication, 32*, 233-248.

Kolb, J. A. (1996). Let's bring structure back. *Management Communication Quarterly, 9*, 452-465.

Larkey, L. K. (1996). Toward a theory of communicative interactions in culturally diverse workgroups. *Academy of Management Review, 32*, 463-491.

Larson, C. & LaFasto, F. (1989). *Teamwork: What must go right; what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Miner, F. C. (1984). Group versus individual decision making: An investigation of performance measures, decision strategies, and process losses/gains. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 33*, 112-124.

McRoy, C. (1996). Effect of conceptual level on group conflict interaction. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 21*(1), 11-17.

Pace, R. (1990). Personalized and depersonalized conflict in small group discussions: An examination of differentiation. *Small Group Research, 21*, 79-96.

Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Pelled. L. (1996). Relational demography and perceptions of group conflict and performance. A field investigation. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 7*, 230-246.

Pelled, L., & Adler, P. (1994). Antecedents of intergroup conflict in multifunctional product development teams: A Conceptual model. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, 41*, 21-48.

Poole, M. S. (1991). Procedures for managing meetings: Social and technological innovation. In R. A. Swanson & B. O. Knapp (Eds.), *Innovative meeting management* (pp. 53-110). Austin, TX: 3M Meeting Management Institute.

Putnam, L. L. (1986). Conflict in group decision-making. In R. Y. Hirokawa & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and group decision-making* (pp. 175-196). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Reddy, W. B. (1994). *Intervention skills: Process consultation for small groups and teams*. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer .

Ross, R. S. (1989). *Small groups in organizational settings*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rybak, C. (1997). Group conflict: Communication patterns and group development. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 21*(1), 11-17.

Schein, E. H. (1979). Personal changes through interpersonal relationships. In W. Bennis, J. Van Maanen, E. H. Schein, & F. I. Steele (Eds.), Essays in interpersonal dynamics. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Schein, E. H. (1987). *Process consultation: Vol. II: Lessons for managers and consultants*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schwarz, R. M. (1994). *The skilled facilitator: Practical wisdom for developing effective groups*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Seers, A., Petty, M. M., & Cashman, J. (1995). Team-member exchange under team and traditional management: A naturally occurring quasi-experiment. *Group & Organization Management, 20*, 18-38.

Seibold, D. R. (1994). Developing the 'team' in a team managed organization: Group facilitation in a new-design plant. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *Innovations in group facilitation: Applications in natural settings* (pp. 282-298). Cresskill, NJ; Hampton Press.

Stevens, J. (1994). The knowledge, skill, and ability requirements for teamwork: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Management, 20*, 503-530.

Valacich, J., & Schwenk, C. (1995). Devil's advocacy and dialectical inquiry effects on face-to-face and computer-mediated group decision making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 63*(2), 158-173.

A Test of a Rapid Developer Model: Workplace Factors Associated with Learning and Development

James A. Alexander
Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey

The author constructed a literature-based "rapid developer model" that identified the work environment factors that could be expected to be associated with rapid development. The author then conducted an empirical test to determine the extent to which the model was supported in actual experience. The main hypothesis that employees identified as "rapid developers" by management would report differences from the comparison group was not supported. However, when employees themselves identified other employees as rapid developers, differences as predicted by the model were consistently discovered.

Keywords: Organizational Learning, Work Environment, Organization Changes

Introduction

How quickly individuals learn and develop new knowledge, skills, and mindsets directly contributes to performance. In fact, speed may well be the critical source of competitive advantage (Stalk & Hout, 1990). In order to flourish, people and organizations must learn to adapt faster and faster or be weeded out in the economic evolutionary process.

Three elements affect how quickly individuals learn and develop in organizations. The characteristics of the individual, the quality of the learning intervention, and the elements that compose the work environment have all been shown to impact the transfer of learning from formal setting to the job (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). All three of these must be considered both from the standpoint of their individual merits as well as from the effects of interaction among each other.

Analysis of learner characteristics and evaluations of effective learning interventions have been studied extensively, while very little research has examined the impact of workplace factors on learning. This is in spite of the fact that the role of the work environment has been speculated to be the most important contributor to how quickly learning and development occurs. Experts have estimated that factors in the workplace may well account for 80 to 85% of problems associated with learning and performance (Deming, 1982; Rummler & Brache, 1990); however, more empirical support is needed for the views of these authors.

This paper explores the work environment's role in how quickly people learn and develop in organizations undergoing significant change. First, a "rapid developer" model is presented. Next, the findings of an empirical test of the model are reviewed to determine the extent to which the rapid developer model was supported in actual experience. Finally, implications are explored and ideas offered for researchers and practitioners interested in improving the quality and the speed of learning.

Model Development

The literature on learning and development is distributed across a number of fields of study. The author reviewed the literature pertaining to workplace learning and development by experts in, performance technology, training, total quality, organization learning, and organization culture.

Quality experts Deming (1982) and Juran (1995) both state the critical importance of management providing a work environment with the correct elements in place for all employees to do their job well. The work environment factors of data, instruments, and incentives (Gilbert, and performance specifications, task interference, consequences, and feedback (Rummler & Brache, 1990) been proposed by performance technologists as the most critical elements to address in efforts to improve learning and performance. Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) in their review of the training literature also provide evidence of the significance of both the pre- and post-training environment in transfer of training. For example, the presence of rewards and job aids encourage the application of new knowledge and skills, while lack of appropriate tools (such as necessary equipment) prohibit application. Later research demonstrates that social and goal cues, positive feedback, negative feedback, punishment consequences, extrinsic reinforcement consequences, intrinsic reinforcement consequences all have direct effect on post-training

Copyright © 1999 James A. Alexander

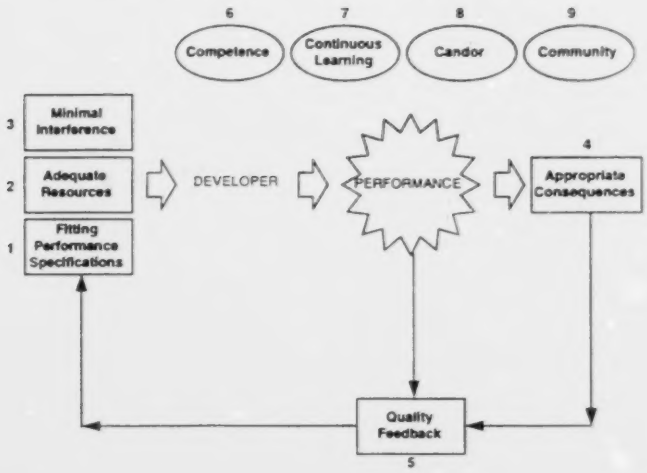
behavior (Tracy, Tannenbaum, & Kavanaugh, 1995). A common characteristic of the above factors is that all of them are under the immediate and the direct control of management.

Other workplace factors associated with learning and development uncovered in the literature review stem from the organization's culture. Culture is the set of shared, taken-for-granted, implicit assumptions that a group holds and determine how it perceives and reacts to various situations (Schein, 1992). Significant learning, (what Argyris and Schön (1997) call "double-loop learning," or what Juran (1995) terms "breakthrough") must address the culture by modifying the underlying norms, policies, and objectives of the organization.

Numerous cultural factors have been identified as contributing to learning and performance. What the authors describe as a continuous-learning culture (social support, continuous innovation, and competitiveness) had direct effects on post-training behavior (Tracy, Tannenbaum & Kavanaugh 1995) and job performance (Martineau, 1995). It has been postulated that in order to achieve organizational excellence, learning, competence, and justice must be an everyday part of the organization (Argyris 1990), and all members of the organization must begin struggling with a new level of self awareness, candor, and responsibility (Argyris 1994). Finally, and most importantly, it has been demonstrated that culture can have a major effect on an organization's long-term economic performance (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

However, culture is the result of actions that take place over many years. Members of the culture will resist any and all efforts that they feel attack "their way of life" and efforts to change it in the short-run usually fail (Juran, 1995; Kotter, 1996). Since learning demands change and culture abhors change, the challenge then is to develop, over time, a culture that both embraces (and holds constant) learning and change (Schein, 1992). It is the primary role of the leader to create such a culture.

Figure 1: Rapid Developer Model



Based upon the commonalties discovered in the review, the researcher created a nine factor model which identified and defined the contextual factors that could be expected to be associated with rapid development. Five "situational factors", that appear to be under the immediate and direct control of management, and four "cultural factors", that are the product of leadership activities often formed over the course of years. Figure 1 displays the Rapid Developer Model.

Situational Factors

1. Fitting Performance Specifications

The fitting performance specifications factor is a central element of the work environment. The underlying rationale is that the better people understand expectations, where they come from, and why they are important, the better people will perform. This factor is present when performance specifications are clear, realistic, align with other expectations, and support the business strategy.

2. Adequate Resources

People need resources to meet the expectations of their jobs. Ideally, these resources should be available immediately whenever needed and packaged appropriately to productively complete required tasks. This factor is present when performers have the following resources when they need it: information, staffing, time and the appropriate tools.

3. Minimal Interference

For people to exhibit new behaviors, the proper steps must be in place that support their work efforts. Anything that interferes with people performing priority tasks must be eliminated or at least minimized. This factor is present when job procedures and workflow are logical for the new tasks, there are ample opportunities to perform new tasks, and the tasks can be done without interference from other tasks.

4. Appropriate Consequences

Consequences play an important role in the achievement of expectations. Along with the intrinsic consequences that the individual brings with him or her to the job, extrinsic consequences that impact behavior are found in the work setting. The appropriate positive consequences reinforce desired behavior while the appropriate negative consequences stifle undesired behavior. This factor is present when consequences are aligned to support the newly desired performance, aligned with other performance expectations, timely, and meaningful to the performer.

5. Quality Feedback

Feedback is important for individuals to gauge their performance in respect to goals and expectations. Feedback is especially important when people are experimenting with new behaviors. Quality feedback reinforces desired behavior and reduces non-productive behavior. This factor is present when feedback is relevant, accurate, timely, specific, and easy to understand.

Cultural Factors

6. Competence

Organizations can no longer tolerate individuals who do not contribute to the success of the enterprise. Politics can not be considered more important than performance in measuring employee value. Although hard work is often still seen as both admirable and desirable, it is being placed secondarily behind smart work that produces the same or greater results with less effort. This factor is present when: results are valued more than hard work, performance is more important than political connections in getting recognized and rewarded, individuals take personal responsibility for their actions, and there is tolerance of unusual style or behavior of the people who do good work.

7. Continuous Learning

Continuous learning is an organizational mindset that recognizes and values the need for both incremental gains and brand-new innovations by all organization members. Mistakes are not only tolerated but expected as a natural part of learning. This factor is present when: both continuous improvement and innovation are valued,

methodologies are present to support them, systems are in place to capture, store, and transfer knowledge, and quality failure is acceptable.

8. Candor

Candor is present in organization culture when people routinely question and challenge the unsupported talk and actions of all individuals whatever their rank or base of power. Organizational candor means that truth is much more important than saving face and that trust evolves through open and honest dialogue and reflection. This factor is present when: people are frank even when ideas directly confront those of superiors, people challenge the unsupported talk and actions of others, and people routinely stop to reflect about what they are doing and why.

9. Community

In a time of major change, people need the support and fellowship of other individuals at work. Shared commitment helps individuals to take risk knowing that others will help them. This factor is present when: people routinely support individuals who ask for help, people think of their roles in terms of the larger organization, and people are involved in change efforts and feel they can influence what happens.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis developed to test the credibility of the model was that rapid developers perceive more work environment factors are present than not-rapid developers. If the evidence supports this hypothesis, the case could be made that the work environment plays an important role in the speed of learning and development and the model is a useful tool in helping to determine rapid developers.

Methodology

Three organizations undergoing significant organizational change in which important learning interventions were occurring were chosen to participate in this study to test the rapid developer model. Populations from which research respondents were drawn were sales, service, and first-line supervision. Through personal and telephone interviews, extensive background research was conducted by the researcher to understand the organization history, context of the change, issues being addressed, details of the learning intervention, and new expectations of the target population.

A detailed process was put in place by the researcher to develop a criteria for rapid development specific to each organization. With researcher guidance, managers from the three organizations learned about rapid development and discussed the implications for their organization. A rapid developer was defined for the managers as "someone who has learned new information and exhibited new behaviors relevant to the changes quicker than other individuals. Ideally, these changes in behavior lead to results that align with the new expectations." The researcher emphasized that today's rapid developers are not necessarily today's top performers.

The group was then asked to list behaviors that would represent rapid development in their specific situation. Next, the managers were given a list of all the individuals in the population being studied and asked to identify the 10 individuals whom they thought were the most rapid developers from the start of the change intervention till the day of the session. Managers presented their choices giving examples of behavior to support their selection. The researcher facilitated the groups to discuss and come up through consensus a final list of 10 rapid developers. Random samples from the remaining individuals in the population were selected to act as a comparison group.

Early in the study, a design concern arose concerning the participating organization management's ability to identify rapid developers. This was first made evident during the gathering of background information and confirmed during the facilitation of the nomination of rapid developers. Managers, at least in these three organizations, are not accustomed to thinking about learning and development behavior nor monitoring developmental behavior outcomes. Managers may not have acquired the rational evidence needed to make valid judgments about who among their reports are rapid developers. Therefore, an additional source for nominating rapid developers was sought. It was postulated that the actual members of the population under study could accurately identify rapid developers based upon their first-hand experience. For these reasons, prior to actual implementation, a

"reality check" was integrated into the study with a question added to the interview in which all research respondents were asked to nominate their own list of rapid developers from the population under study.

An individual from each participating organization took the names of the 10 rapid developers nominated by management and the 10 individuals selected at random and faxed them to the interviewer. Individuals were not identified in any way. The interviewer was familiar with the general focus of the research but unaware of the research hypothesis or the specifics of the study design. Following the same questioning guidelines, extensive telephone interviews of the research respondents averaging about 30 minutes in length were conducted to learn their perceptions of the work environment factors purported by the research model to impact the speed of learning and development. All 58 interviews (two individuals were contacted but never interviewed) were recorded and transcribed word-for-word substituting names with codes.

Using the software program HyperResearch as a sorting tool, the researcher read each interview transcript, coding relevant comments into one of nine categories each representing a model factor. Rereading the comments relevant to a specific category, the researcher scored each of the nine factors as either being "present," "not present" or "not able to tell" for each participant. The "not able to tell" was chosen when either the participant stated that he or she did not know the answer to the question asked, the appropriate question was not asked, or the answer was ambiguous. Prior to conducting the research, certain questions were chosen to be the main determiners of the presence or absence of a factor. For example, here are the questions asked to learn about each respondent's perception of the fitting performance factor: "What are ___ expectations of you?" "What else?" "Any other expectations?" "It sounds like lots of things have changed these past ___ years. Which of these expectations are different than in the past?" "How so?" "Any other changes in what you are supposed to do?" "Are these new expectations clear?"* "Why do you say that?" "Are the new expectations realistic?"* "Say more". "Who was involved in determining these new expectations?" "How?" "What's the reason for all the changes any way?" For the researcher to consider this factor present for the respondent, positive responses were needed for each of the two asterisked questions. A similar approach was used for all nine factors.

At a later point in time, the researcher sorted the data by category. Not referencing the earlier analysis, the researcher read through the data by category and again scored each factor as present, not present, or not able to tell. The researcher then compared the two analyses finding a discrepancy rate of 8%. The researcher investigated each discrepancy by re-examining the sorted information as well as reading the entire transcript in question again to determine a final score.

Before learning which research participants had been selected by management or respondents as rapid developers, the researcher ranked respondents by the total number of factors perceived present and predicted that the top 10 individuals from each participating organization were the rapid developers. The researcher recorded the codes to these ten respondents in a memo and sent it to the organization sponsor before learning the organization's predictions of rapid developers.

Results

Table 1 demonstrates how well the model holds up when manager-selected rapid developers are compared to a randomly-selected group. The left-hand column labeled "category" shows that there were 28 individuals in the rapid developer group and 28 individuals in the comparison group for a total of 56 respondents. The next column to the right shows the counts and the percentages of the comparison groups by factor. For example, 48%, or 13 or 27, of the manager-selected rapid developer group, perceived that the Fitting Performance Specification factor was present. 50%, or 14 of 28, of the randomly-selected comparison group felt that the Fitting Performance Specification was present. This approach is used for all factors with the column at the far right providing totals for the rows.

The third row shows the column totals representing the overall average perception of all research participants combined. For example, scores ranged from a low of only about 12% of all respondents feeling that the Candor factor was present in their work environment to about 93% of all respondents feeling that the Community factor was present. Overall, the individuals interviewed felt that about 53% of the workplace factors were present in their work environment.

Logistic regression was chosen as the inferential statistics tests as it is appropriate both for the testing of categorical data as well as dealing with the multiple variables under analysis. The logistic regression test analyzes whether the proportion of factors present is greater for one group than another. Therefore, the null hypothesis was that there is no difference in the proportion of factors present between manager-selected and the comparison group. Statistics confirm what is visually apparent, there are no differences between the manager-selected and the randomly-selected comparison groups. The logistic regression analysis reveals a probability of 0.52. A probability of

less than .05 is necessary to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the null hypothesis in not rejected and the model is not supported when managers select the rapid developers.

Table 2 shows counts and percentages for the respondent-selected rapid developers versus a comparison group. The respondent-selected group is composed of the 13 individuals selected by respondents as rapid developers who were actually interviewed. The comparison group consists of the remaining 43 individuals interviewed who were not selected as rapid developers by research respondents. Review of the data shows that respondent-selected rapid developers show more presence than the comparison group on all nine of the work environment factors. The logistic regression test was again used to look for differences between these two groups. In this case, the null hypothesis was that there is no difference in the proportion of factors present between the respondent selected and the comparison group. When making this comparison, the logistic regression analysis displays a probability of 0.03 with a positive parameter estimate. Thus, there is a difference between these two groups and the model is supported when respondents select the rapid developers.

Conclusion

Assuming that managers did not know who the rapid developers were and the peer group did, the data show that the presence of workplace factors are associated with rapid development. These research findings provide needed empirical support for the thinking of theorists, the research-to-date on the work environment, and the experience of practitioners. An enabling work environment appears to be vital to learning, change, and performance. If the results of this study are representative of what would be found in other organizations, then these findings help provide rationale for: (a) why major organizational change is so difficult, takes so long, and often fails; (b) why individuals undergo such stress, frustration, and great difficulty in adapting to major change; and (c) why the return on training and other learning interventions is typically so marginal.

However, the findings also present a major opportunity. On average, the data show that the organizations participating in the study were operating at about 50% of their desired level of performance regarding workplace factors associated with learning and development. The opportunity to close this gap provides a performance improvement potential of 100%. Focusing management resources on improving the work environment can provide an excellent learning and performance ROI. If additional research continues to support these findings, it would support several recommendations that can be made at this time.

Fix the Work Environment First. In two of the three organizations, senior management strongly stated their commitment to dramatic change in the operation of their organizations. Great emphasis had been placed upon providing whatever resources were required including large amounts of training and other learning interventions to all members of the populations under study. However, after one and two years respectively, results had not met senior manager expectations. Although these executives strongly espoused the business need for rapid learning and development, none had taken steps specifically aimed at addressing the work environment. In light of the limited presence of overall work environment factors, the principle of fixing the learning environment before addressing the specific needs of the learner (Gilbert, 1978; Rummler & Brache, 1990) gains credence. The data suggest that management efforts aimed at first clearly understanding, defining, and communicating each of the model factors in light of the organizational changes could speed learning and performance.

Provide Managers with the Information They Need. Although the concept of rapid development was readily confirmed as being extremely significant, the construct of rapid development specific to any of the organizations had not been developed. No definition existed, no goals were in place, no measures upon which to compare and improve were available. When management determined a clear definition of what rapid development should look like in their organization, they had very little data upon which to make selections. Without the appropriate information, management was out of touch and therefore unable to identify rapid developers nor able to provide the appropriate managerial support necessary to accelerate the learning process. Educating managers about the significance of the work environment regarding change, learning, and performance, then defining and operationalizing rapid learning and development relative to their organization can help provide managers with the necessary information required to guide, monitor, and support organization change.

Use the Model as a Change Tool. The model may have use at several points whenever organization change is occurring and subsequently learning and development is important. The model may be used at the onset

of a change intervention to evaluate organization readiness. The findings can be used to increase management's awareness of the work environment relevant to learning, its importance in the change process, and assess areas of strength and concern. It can also postpone the seemingly ever-present urge to hurl training immediately at all concerned.

For example, a task force of individuals targeted for the change can be armed with the model and charged with determining the status of the current work environment and suggesting changes to make it supportive of the new expectations. If the model is supported by further research it could also be used to measure progress by reassessing the work environment during the change. This will give information toward successes and challenges as well as help focus remedial activities and improve on-going efforts.

Expand the Research Base. This research is a case study which includes only the information from three organizations. Replicating the research with more organizations makes sense as a first step. Other proofs of reality (beyond perceptions) would add to the strength of the findings, especially since the concept of rapid developers is not common to current thinking. Using techniques similar to observation of exemplar performers (Gilbert, 1978), observations of both rapid and not-rapid developers would help to compare and contrast behaviors of thinking, doing, and reflecting. In addition, it would be helpful if future studies included some performance measurement to link learning and development to outcomes. Finally, this study is limited to exploring the work environment's role in how quickly people learn and develop in organizations undergoing significant change. Studies able to address both the work environment and the characteristics of the learner could shed light as to how these important variables work together.

TABLE 1 Manager-Selected Rapid Developers vs. Comparison Group

Category	FACTOR 1 Fitting Performance Specifications	2 Adequate Resources	3 Minimal Interference	4 Appropriate Consequences	5 Quality Feedback	6 Competence	7 Continuous Learning	8 Candor	9 Community	Total
TOTAL FOR ALL THREE ORGANIZATIONS (56 participants)										
Rapid - 28	13/27 48%	19/28 68%	11/26 42%	11/27 41%	10/25 40%	7/20 35%	18/24 75%	4/26 15%	27/28 96%	120/231 52%
Comparison - 28	14/28 50%	19/27 70%	10/24 42%	15/27 56%	17/26 65%	8/25 32%	18/23 78%	2/25 8%	25/28 89%	128/233 55%
TOTAL - 56	27/55 49%	38/55 69%	21/50 42%	26/54 48%	27/51 53%	15/45 33%	36/47 76%	6/51 12%	52/56 93%	248/464 53%

TABLE 2 Respondent-Selected Rapid Developers vs. Comparison Group

Category	FACTOR 1 Fitting Performance Specifications	2 Adequate Resources	3 Minimal Interference	4 Appropriate Consequences	5 Quality Feedback	6 Competence	7 Continuous Learning	8 Candor	9 Community	Total
TOTAL FOR ALL THREE ORGANIZATIONS (56 participants)										
Rapid - 13	7/13 54%	11/13 85%	8/13 62%	6/12 50%	7/11 64%	6/11 54%	9/11 82%	2/13 15%	13/13 100%	69/110 63%
Comparison - 43	20/42 48%	27/42 64%	14/37 38%	19/42 45%	20/40 50%	9/34 26%	27/36 75%	4/38 10%	39/43 91%	179/354 51%

References

Argyris, C. (1994, July-August). Good communication that blocks learning. Harvard Business Review.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1977). Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Argyris, Chris. (1990). Overcoming organizational defenses: Facilitating organizational learning. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Baldwin, T.T., & Ford, J.K. (1988). Transfer of training: A review and directions for future research. Personnel Psychology, 43, 63-105.

Deming, W. E. (1982). Quality productivity and competitive position. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Center for advanced engineering study, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Gilbert, T.F. (1978). Human competence: Engineering worthy performance. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Juran, J.M. (1995). Managerial breakthrough: The classic book on improving management performance (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Kotter, J.P. (1996). Leading change. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kotter, J.P., and Heskett, J.L., (1992). Corporate culture and performance. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Martineau, J.W. (1995). Doctoral dissertation. A contextual examination of the effectiveness of a supervisory skills training program. Dissertation Abstracts International, 56-09B, 5207.

Rummler, G.A., & Brache, A.P. (1990). Improving performance: How to manage the white space on the organization chart. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E.H. (1992). Organizational culture and leadership (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

Stalk, Jr., G., & Hout, T.M. (1990). Competing against time: How time-based competition is reshaping global markets. New York, NY: Free Press.

Tannenbaum, S.I., & Yukl, G. (1992). Training and development in work organizations. Annual Review of Psychology, 43.

Tracy, J.B., Tannenbaum, S.I., and Kavanaugh, M.J. (1995). Applying trained skills on the job: The importance of the work environment. Journal of Applied Psychology, 80, 239-252.

Barriers to Transformation Change: High Performance Workplace Practices and Unionized Companies

Joseph A. Benkowski
University of Wisconsin-Stout

The purpose of this study was to identify which characteristics of high-performance workplaces as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) in the categories of training, participation, organization, and partnership are being practiced at unionized companies in Wisconsin. Also examined is the relationship between the implementation level of these high performance workplace practices and the level of labor-management cooperation. The study results provide both management and union officials with research regarding the influence of cooperation in achieving economic success, in part, through the implementation of high-performance work practices involving training, participation, organization, and partnership.

Keywords: High Performance Organizations, Transformation and Unions, Labor Management Cooperation

Many of the traditional work practices initiated by unions in the 1930s and 1940s are being challenged by corporate America in the form of high performance organizations. In this new structure workers have been given greater responsibilities in their jobs as a means of reducing the decision making process. Contrary to this belief, unions and management have carefully constructed contract language known as management rights that go against high performance initiatives.

Expounding on this issue, a barrier that has limited the transformation process of organizations in moving to high-performance is management's inability to make complementary changes in managerial practices and production practices. Without such changes in management practices, the needed changes in work practices or labor relations have limited payoffs (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1994). No magic formula exists for creating successful employee involvement. Nonetheless, organizations striving to tap into the resources of their workforce must build support from employees, managers, unions, and business partners (Levine, 1995). In a unionized company, changes to a high performance workplace would appear to be dependent on cooperation between management and labor.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to explore the following issues:

1. To what extent have the 15 high performance workplace practices as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) been implemented at all or only selected manufacturing unionized companies in Wisconsin?
2. What is the relationship between the implementation level of the practices as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) for the categories of strategic planning, training and human resources and the level of cooperation between union and management?

Three preconditions are required to develop employee support and capacity for employee involvement to succeed. First, workers need to be involved and given some responsibility for organizational change and daily work planning. Employees need mechanisms through which their suggestions may be evaluated and implemented. If jobs are narrowly defined and rigid, workers have less opportunity to make suggestions. Second, employees must be motivated to make improvements. While the incentive mechanisms in high-performance organizations vary widely, the objectives are to share the rewards gained from new ideas. Third, workers must be capable of making improvements. Their knowledge and skills need to be developed through training and continuous learning, and their ideas and recommendations are given consideration through information exchanges (Levine, 1995). Recent evidence shows that there has been widespread experimentation with a variety of participatory techniques and substantial

Copyright © 1999 Joseph A. Benkowski

changes in work rules. The data also shows, however, that the extent of work restructuring is often limited and piecemeal (Kochan, Katz and McKersie, 1994).

Methodology

Survey Population and Sample

The researcher contacted several sources in an effort to obtain a published list of unionized companies in Wisconsin. The sources included the U.S. Department of Labor, Washington D.C.; the Department of Labor in Wisconsin; the AFL-CIO, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and the state senator's office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The researcher was told by each source that a list of this nature was not developed. A list was finally developed on the advisement of Dr. Paula Voos, University of Wisconsin. In her 1987 study, *The influence of cooperative programs on union-management relations, flexibility, and other labor relations outcomes*, Dr. Voos was able to construct a list of unionized firms in Wisconsin through the Wisconsin Employee Relations Commission in Madison, Wisconsin. Unions are required by state law to file with the Wisconsin Employee Relations Commission for "Reopener Notices" at the expiration of a collective bargaining agreement. A reopener notice is a formal document that is sent to the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission making them aware that union and management of a specific company has opened their renegotiation process.

The information provided in this document includes the company and contact person, plus the name of the union and their representative. It also includes the number of employees in the company and the number of employees covered by the contract. It also states the principle product or service of the company.

The same methodology was used for this study, with one exception. Since the length of contracts varies from 1 to 4 years, the researcher selected reopener notices with 50 or more employees for the years 1993-1996. A total of 995 reopener notices were obtained. The reopener notices represented union contracts with labor membership employed in the job cluster of manufacturing, construction, office workers, health care, trucking, banking, and warehousing. Based on the review of literature, only manufacturing organizations were surveyed for this study. A total of 388 manufacturing companies were identified from the obtained reopener notices.

During the selection of the manufacturing reopener notices, the process revealed that union officials often represented more than one organization. The researcher determined that sending more than one survey to the same union official could lead to confusion. A total of 152 individual union representatives were identified from the reopener notices. Selection of the manufacturing organizations was done by using a computer printout that was developed for the initial list of manufacturing firms. A random sampling process was used from the computer printout to obtain 152 companies. Union representatives were then selected to match the organization they represent. A survey population of 304 was based on this process. The reopener notices provided the names and addresses of the union and the company official responsible for the collective bargaining agreement.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A survey instrument was used to collect the data pertaining to the research questions. The instrument was developed based on research done in two previous studies. The first research study was conducted by Work in America. In this study the research was conducted by analyzing organizations that have characteristics of a high performance workplace. These studies have repeatedly found that human resources, as it reflects in the skills and commitment of the workforce, are more effective through partnerships that are focused on common goals and equal involvement of all stakeholders in policy and other decision making. The study was conducted with the help of management executives, union leaders, and academic experts in human resource management. The selection was based on members' previous involvement and experiences in new relationships that made operations, labor, and human resources management full partners in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. As a result of this study a list of 10 key features were established which complemented the study done by the U.S. Department of Labor.

In 1993 a growing number of U.S. companies recognized that today's business environment requires them to be innovative in the way they do work. To assist companies facing these challenges of change and to educate those companies in search of becoming a high-performance organization, the Office of the American Workplace (OAW) was created in 1993 under the Department of Labor. Its' mission is to encourage good workplace practices that lead to better jobs and better business results. The Office of the American Workplace used the experiences of a large number of companies to do the research. The main thrust of the research was to identify key indicators that

companies could use in gauging their effectiveness in becoming a high performance organization. The key indicators were similar to those of the Work in America study.

Following are the 15 key indicators used in this research:

1. Workers are actively involved in redefining their jobs.
2. Workers modify their work processes to correct quality problems or procedures.
3. Workers modify their work processes to correct production problems or procedures.
4. Workers modify their work processes to correct safety problems or procedures.
5. Workers are actively involved in meeting internal customers.
6. Workers are actively involved in the selection of new technology.
7. Individuals or teams receive feedback about the workers suggestions.
8. Workers are organized into teams with substantial authority.
9. Cross-functional teams or other mechanisms are used to increase innovation across organizational boundaries.
10. The plant organization has reduced the layers of management from previous organizational structures.
11. The company and the union engage in innovative collective bargaining agreements.
12. Current training programs are explicitly implemented to support strategic plans.
13. Current training programs are developed to support continuous learning.
14. Training expenditures are distributed across the company's entire workforce.
15. Training programs are evaluated for their effectiveness.

To develop the questionnaire the researcher used the 10 work practices identified in the Office of the American Workplace. The questions were modified, since several of the workplace practices statement related to multiple points. With the modification a total of 15 statements were used in the survey. The organizational characteristics used in the survey were from a previous study done by Dr. Paula Voos, which was titled *The influence of cooperative programs on union-management relations, flexibility, and labor relations outcomes*. The researcher received permission to use the organizational characteristics.

Dillman (1978) recommended a three-step approach to pretesting. The researcher followed Dillman's suggestions for improving the survey. The first step was to send the survey to a select group of five training professionals who have in-depth knowledge of high performance organizations. They were asked to review the survey for clarity of questions and directions, as well as the layout and flow of the survey. Modifications were made on their recommendations.

The second step was to have a group of potential users of the data examine the survey instrument. Here the researcher made a modification from Dillman's recommendation. Instead of potential users, six experts in the field of high performance were selected to evaluate the survey using the same criteria as in step 1. This was done so that personnel in the survey population would not be asked twice to provide information.

The third step as recommended by Dillman (1978) is to collect pretest information from subjects drawn from the population to be surveyed. A pilot study was conducted by mailing a cover letter, the survey, a return envelope and a return postcard, which was used to identify which firms returned the survey. The pilot study included 32 of the 304 study participants, approximately 10 percent of the population. The pilot study was conducted to estimate the rate of return and to determine if modifications to the survey were necessary. Of the 32 surveys mailed for the pilot test, 22 were returned, 12 from management and 10 from labor. This represented a response rate of 70 percent. No modifications to the survey were deemed necessary.

The adjusted study population included 272 unionized Wisconsin firms (pretest participants not included). Just as in the pilot survey, those not responding to the initial mailing were contacted by phone. A total of 137 surveys were returned. In addition to the 22 surveys returned from the pilot survey a total of 159 were received from the participants representing a 52.3 percent return rate. Of the 159 surveys returned 65 came from union representatives and 94 from management.

Findings

Parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire consisted of questions relating *to organizational characteristics*. Respondents answered the first question of union responses that were based on plant, divisions, and/or departments. as a *corporation, business unit or a division and/or a department*. There were 58.5 percent, which accounted for the greatest number of single union responses. Management's greatest single response was as a corporation accounting

for 37.2 percent. In the category of *total number of employees*, union had the greatest frequency in the category of 100-249 employees, which accounted for 29.2 percent of the responses. This was also the most frequent response for management at 33 percent. The next largest category was 250-499 employees: 21.5 percent for union and 21.3 percent for management. *The type of organization for which they were completing the survey*: both union and management had the greatest response to 'other,' which included manufacturing of hydraulics components, metal fabrication and sheet metal, union having a response of 46.1 percent and management with a response of 51.1 percent. Assembly was next with union having a response of 15.1 percent and management with 12.8 percent.

Years your organization has been involved in building partnerships for high performance: one to three years was the greatest response for union and management; 32.3 for union and 30.9 for management. Four to six years was the second largest response for union and management. Union representatives had a response of 16.9 percent for zero years of being involved in high performance, and management had a response of 8.5 percent

In the category of reasons the company had to change from its present way of doing business: the percent given for each question was based on a separate response, since more than one response could be given. Union and management both gave a major change in production technology as the most frequent response with 53.3 percent for union and management with 47.9 percent. They also gave changes in the amount of skills required by workers as their second response for change with 46.2 percent for unions and 39.4 percent for management. Major change in industrial bargaining patterns, was the third most frequent response for both union and management, union had a response of 36.9 percent compared to 14.9 for management.

Since 1992 have any of the following changed for your company? The most frequent response was international competition followed by non-union domestic firms. The last statement, *which of the following best describes your organization's strategy for achieving competitive advantages*: forty percent of the union representatives indicated that service at a lower cost than competitors was the advantage, while management had a 35.1 percent for better quality or different product as their organizations strategy.

ResearchQuestion #1: To what extent have the 15 workplace practices as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) been implemented at all or only selected unionized companies in Wisconsin

Table 1 T-test was used to determine significance between union and management mean scores. Nine out of the fifteen workplace practices showed a difference existed at the .05 level. In all nine workplace practices management means were higher than the union means.

Table 1

Description of Implementation Practices in Unionized Companies in Wisconsin as Viewed by Management and Labor

Workplace Practices #	Management Mean	Union Mean	Management Standard Deviation	Union Standard Deviation	Management Median	Union Median	p
1	33.66	32.46	24.13	27.62	30	30	.08
2	53.72	44.15	26.15	27.27	60	40	.03
3	51.81	44.77	26.56	28.84	50	50	.14
4	60.53	54.31	25.58	28.34	65	60	.16
5	42.77	30.92	28.34	29.19	40	20	.01
6	38.62	30.15	26.34	26.37	40	30	.05
7	50.85	35.38	28.31	29.74	50	30	.00
8	33.09	28.46	28.06	26.47	30	20	.29
9	39.36	28.31	28.31	26.63	40	20	.01
10	49.68	28.77	33.00	27.75	50	30	.41
11	44.36	40.31	29.53	30.46	40	40	.41
12	42.87	29.85	26.87	24.65	50	30	.00
13	45.21	31.91	28.99	23.89	40	30	.00
14	50.22	29.38	31.62	27.94	50	20	.00
15	45.74	30.78	30.62	28.08	50	20	.00

Note. Management responses to all workplace practices were 45.5 percent, while labor responses were 30 percent to all workplace practices.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Research Question #2 - What is the relationship between the implementation level of the practices as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) for the categories of strategic planning, training and human resources and the level of cooperation between management and labor.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of the Implementation Level of Strategic Planning as Reported by Management and Labor

Question: To what extent has your organization followed a business strategy to develop a partnership between union and management in the following?	Management (N = 91)		Union (N = 58)	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Delegating decision-making authority to the lowest level of the organization.	2.98	1.14	2.31	1.16
Mutually agreeing on organizational goals.	2.48	1.14	2.40	1.26
Mutually agreeing on organizational structure redesign.	2.25	1.11	2.10	1.07
Mutually agreeing on improved communications.	3.08	1.10	2.79	1.20
Implementing strategic plans.	2.41	1.17	2.28	1.17
Creating a shared mission and vision.	2.80	1.34	2.57	1.23
Specifying business objectives to drive training.	2.58	1.21	2.43	1.17
Providing a sustainable competitive advantage through training.	2.71	1.16	3.20	1.02

Note. Response scale 1 = no extent 2 = very little extent 3 = some extent 4 = considerable extent 5 = very great extent

Three management personnel and seven union representatives indicated "does not apply."

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of the Implementation Level of Training as Reported by Management and Labor

To what extent do the following statements reflect your union's involvement in training?	Management (N = 89)		Union (N = 58)	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Developing a formal, jointly written mission statement that outlines the role of training in supporting your overall business strategy.	2.03	1.13	2.40	1.30
Assisting in developing a plan for training.	2.55	1.23	2.55	1.24
Assisting in supporting and implementing of a plan for training.	2.72	1.25	2.76	1.27
Participating in developing a training curricula.	2.53	1.27	2.52	1.27
Participating in developing standards for training.	2.38	1.23	2.26	1.22
Participating as instructors in on the job peer training.	3.01	1.32	2.71	1.36
Establishing training budgets.	1.80	1.17	1.72	.98
Giving training to supervisors (team leaders) in their new roles as a coach.	2.14	1.22	2.05	1.14

Note. Response scale 1 = no extent 2 = very little extent 3 = some extent 4 = considerable extent 5 = very great extent

Seven management personnel and union representatives indicated "does not apply."

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of the Implementation Level of Human Resources as Reported by Management and Labor

To what extent do the following statements reflect the success of your Human Resources Department?	Management (N = 89) M	S.D.	Union (N = 54) M	S.D.
Modifying work rules to provide for greater worker flexibility.	3.02	1.13	2.63	1.69
Developing new compensation programs rewarding desired worker commitment and behavior.	2.63	1.13	2.06	1.02
Partnering with union, when possible, in business decisions.	2.79	1.21	2.26	1.29
Making changes in contractual agreements, when possible, to increase worker flexibility.	3.21	1.09	2.83	1.21
Basing partnerships on a foundation of mutual trust and respect between parties.	3.35	1.08	2.67	1.26
Recognizing the central role of collective bargaining but are committed to shifting issues into joint problem-solving forums.	3.11	1.15	2.35	1.22
Improving overall union relationship in collective bargaining process.	3.48	1.08	2.76	1.24

Note. Response scale 1 = no extent 2 = very little extent 3 = some extent 4 = considerable extent 5 = very great extent

Five management personnel and twelve union representatives indicated "does not apply."

Instead of doing a statistical analysis of each individual workplace practice in table 1 of the survey, the researcher matched each workplace practice to one of the three dependent variables—strategic planning, human resources, and training in tables 2-4. The match was based on the relevance of the workplace practice to the dependent variable. The sum average of strategic planning, human resources, and training was used as the dependent variable to calculate the regression analysis. The 15 workplace practices were the independent variables used in the regression analysis and were grouped as follows: strategic planning, questions 1-9: human resources, questions 10-11: and training, questions 12-15. A separate regression analysis was calculated for each independent variable.

The frequency response by management to workplace practices 1-9 in strategic planning, only workplace practice 6 (approached significance, $p = .083$) "workers are actively involved in the selection of new technology" and workplace practice 9 (approached significance, $p = .66$) "workers are organized into teams with substantial authority". The frequency response by the union did not show a relationship with workplace practices 1-9.

The frequency response by management to workplace practices 10-11 in human resources showed a significant relationship. Workplace practice 10 (significance, $p = .023$) "the plant organization has reduced the layers of management from previous organizational structures", and workplace practice 11 (significance, $p = .000$) "the company and the union engage in innovative collective bargaining agreements.

Conclusions and Implications

This research found that all 15 workplace practices as recommended by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of the American Workplace (1994) are being implemented at various levels in unionized manufacturing companies in Wisconsin. This research found a positive relationship between the implementation levels of four workplace

practices: workers modify their work processes to correct safety problems or procedures; workers modify their work processes to correct production problems or procedures; and workers modify their work processes to correct quality problems or procedures. The company and union engage in innovative collective bargaining agreements.

On the other hand, three workplace practices that did not have a high level of relationship included: workers are actively involved in redefining their jobs; current training programs are developed to support continuous learning; and, workers are actively involved in selecting new technology. The research also found seven workplace practices where management and labor had a low relationship:

- Workers are actively involved in meeting internal customers
- Individuals or teams receive feedback about workers' suggestions
- Workers are organized into teams with substantial authority
- Cross functional teams or other mechanisms are used to increase innovation across organizational boundaries
- Plant organization had reduced the layers of management from previous organizational structures
- Training expenditures were distributed across the entire workforce
- Training programs were evaluated for their effectiveness

This study provided general information on how management and labor perceive their relationship in building high performance organizations. Although the findings of this study indicate that more work is needed to increase the partnership between labor and management, there were several elements that came from the general characteristics of this study that indicated both sides recognized the importance of building a partnership if unionized American industry is to survive. They recognized that production technology was changing and the skills of workers must be increased to meet these changes. Products and services have to be at a lower cost than those of their competitors and the quality has to be increased. They also agreed that different products were needed to stay competitive. In the past four years both agreed that domestic non-union firms had been their biggest competition.

For the implementation level of these 15 workplace practices to increase, management and labor have to take serious note of the Work in America study (1994) which suggests that "partnership is to exhibit the ability of both partners to balance business needs and the interests of employees. As increasing use of joint problem solving helps to break down old distinctions between labor and management thinking and behavior, both recognized that the economic and social levels are interdependent and began to share responsibility of both" (p. 6). Other findings in the study include elements critical to strong partnership, including leadership commitment, gradual building of trust at all levels; sharing power, responsibility, information, and economic gains; and sufficient investment in change.

References

Dillman, D. A. (1978). *Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method.* New York: John Wiley.

Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., & McKersie, R. B. (1994). *The transformation of American industrial relations.* Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Levine, D. I. (1995). *Reinventing the workplace: How business and employees can both win.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

U.S. Department of Labor: Office of the American Workplace. (1994). *Road to high-performance workplaces: A guide to better jobs and better business results.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Voos, P. B. (1987, January). Managerial perceptions of the economic impact of labor relations programs. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 40*(2), 195-208.